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ABSTRACT

An activity unit for teaching students how to write a summary and a precis of a written work is presented. Instructions to the teacher for introducing and carrying out the unit are given along with a list of student objectives. Definitions of relevant terms are included. The activities, some of which are to be done individually and some with a partner or a group, include four introductory activities, five practice activities, and two evaluation activities. Nine attachments which can be photocopied or used as transparencies include a poem and student responses to the poem which can be used as an introduction to the unit; instructions for writing footnotes; an essay which is to be summarized; a summary and a precis of the essay; a list of steps involved in writing a precis; instructions for a precis-writing assignment; parts of the precis which should be reviewed before turning it in; and a review of the definition of a precis. This document is part of a collection of materials from the Iowa Area Education Agency 7 Teacher Center project. (DC)

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PRÉCIS-SUMMARY

activity guide

CS007386

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AREA EDUCATION AGENCY 7

Cedar Falls, Iowa

Document title: Precis-Summary

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PRECIS-SUMMARY

RATIONALE (May be used as an introductory mini-lecture)

Run copies (or a transparency) of the poem "I Wrote Your Name" by Sally Utley. (See attachment #1) Also, make one of the student responses. After the class reads the poem, ask them to rank the student responses in order of how well each one shows understanding of the poem. (The correct ranking, from best to worst, is E, C, D, A, B - see attachment #2).

Discuss the final ranking and reasons for placement of responses. Specificity, non-judgmental responses, and completeness are important characteristics of the best summary.

I. How can you show you've understood something you've read?

   A. Who said it - point of view.

   B. Number and order of major points.

   C. Main idea and/or thesis statement.

   D. Significance of title.

II. If you can identify all of these things in an article you are reading, you can summarize the piece.

III. Why would a person want to summarize?

   A. Is a summary of a lecture ever helpful?

   B. Do textbooks summarize chapters?

   C. Would a summary of an article ever be helpful?

   D. Do you ever summarize an event so you can tell the same story over and over (an accident, trip, etc.?)

IV. The students should copy the objectives. Then note that another type of summary, the précis, is included.

UNIT OBJECTIVES: Prècis, Summary

The students should be able to:

Define prècis and summary*

Recognize examples of prècis and summaries

Document properly quoted and condensed material

Analyze articles in terms of thesis point of view, and main ideas

Write and document a prècis and summary

*Definitions and additional material are available from attachments 6-9 (to be used as transparencies)

SUMMARY - PRÉCIS TERMS

Summary: A paraphrased condensation (usually 1/4 to 1/3 the length of the original) of a piece of writing.

Précis: A summary of a piece of writing maintaining the point of view and tone of the original

Paraphrase: A restatement in one's own words of an author's material

Footnote: A reference to the source of material (title, author, publishing information)

Documentation: References (such as footnotes) which provide proof of accuracy of information

Thesis: The central idea or point of a piece of writing

Point of View: Who is writing, the limitations of the persons or author's knowledge

Plagiarism: Copying words, phrases, or complete sections of a written work

Tone: The author's attitude or emotional state as conveyed in a piece of writing

Activity Guide: Summary & Précis

A. Introductory Activities (Complete all activities in this section)

1. Copy unit objectives.
2. Write sentence definitions of the vocabulary words. You may get these from a lecture, transparency, hand-out, or blackboard.
3. Write a paragraph explaining the difference between the definitions of précis and summary.
4. Take notes or footnote form (see attachment #3).

B. Practice Activities (Complete activities 1 and 2 plus one more)

1. Say a Summary - Say a Précis
   a. Jot down complete notes on an important event in your life (a vacation, a wedding, a graduation).
   b. Select a partner (and make sure your partner has paper and pencil). Using your notes, tell your partner about the event and note your starting and finishing time. The partner may take notes during your story and after you have finished, must summarize the event and tell it back to you in less than half the time you took. For example: if you recount your brother's wedding in six minutes, your partner may take no more than three minutes to tell it back to you. This is a SUMMARY of the event.
   c. Now, write down the major points your partner included, major points left out, and minor details or inaccuracies which should have been left out.
   d. Your partner must again tell you about the event. But this time, the partner pretends to be you and tells the summarized story as if you were telling it. This is the PRÉCIS.
   e. To receive credit for this activity, turn in your timed and corrected notes.

2. Group Summary - Précis of "Self-Control" by Joel Guldner
   a. This activity will be done as a class. Read "Self-Control" and note the main point in each paragraph. Do not copy topic sentences or other material, but paraphrase ideas in your own words. Write also the single most important idea in the paper. This should not be done in sentences.
   b. Now, write a six-sentence paragraph which summarizes the entire paper by including all major points. You may be asked to read your summary aloud.
   c. Look back at the paper and determine the point of view. Write this by your earlier notes. Rewrite the summary using the point of view of the original. (Remember, pronouns are the words most likely to change). Again, you may be asked to read aloud. This is a PRECIS.

d. Be sure to label the notes, summary, précis and footnote "Self Control" before turning in your paper.

3. Find a summary in a television guide of a program you plan to watch. Read the summary carefully before watching the program. Describe how the summary was accurate and how it was inadequate (misleading or incomplete). Finally, write a better (but not much longer) summary of your own. Turn in: the original summary
your evaluation of the summary
your own summary

4. Find three letters to the editor from newspapers or magazines (O.K. - you may use <u>one</u> from Ann Landers or Dear Abby). Pick letters where the writer expresses a strong feeling. Neatly label the point of view and tone (emotion) of each letter and footnote the source.

5. Choose a magazine article at least three pages long. List the main points in the article, as if you were getting ready to write a summary. Include a sentence paraphrase of the first paragraph and last paragraph and turn in the article with your notes and footnote source.

C. <u>Evaluation Activities</u>

1. Find a piece of expository writing which is very emotional (letter, column, editorial). Take notes, write a summary; write a précis. Then explain what a reader would miss if the summary were read, but not the précis. What types of information would be missed and why would they be valuable? Turn in: notes
summary (footnoted)
précis (footnoted)
explanation

2. Choose a partner. You each will take notes on an article you have chosen (two separate people - two different articles at least one page long), and write a summary on your article.
Trade material. Critique each other's notes and summary. Is too much or too little included? Is there any copying (plagiarism)? Is the main idea clear? Write comments on each other's paper and discuss those comments, if necessary. Now write a précis over your original article, taking into account your partner's comments and adding point of view and tone. Turn in: articles
notes and comments
summary (footnoted)
précis (footnoted)

ATTACHMENT #1

I Wrote Your Name

I wrote your name on a wet screen
with my finger;
But a cool breeze took it away.

I wrote your name on a rock with
my wet finger;
But the summer sun took it away.

I wrote your name in the sand with
a piece of drift wood;
But the pounding surf took it away.

I wrote your name on my heart;
But someone else took it away.

Sally K. Utley

ATTACHMENT #2

Student responses to the question "What does this poet say?"

A. "I dunno"

B. "Huh? I didn't hear the question."

C. "Some girls in love with this guy and she writes his name all over."

D. "It's another dumb poem about love."

E. "The girl's feelings for her boyfriend have disappeared just as his name did the three times she wrote it."

ATTACHMENT # 3

FOOTNOTE FORM:

Write the title of your summary or précis as follows:

Summary of "I Wrote your Name"[1]

Précis of "I Wrote Your Name"[1]

Notice the number placed slightly above the final quotation marks. This is the number of the footnote which should be located at the bottom of the page in the following form:

[1]Sally K. Utley, "I Wrote Your Name," West Wind, 1980,p.77.

When footnoting an article from a magazine or newspaper your information should be arranged and punctuated as follows:

[1]Author's First Name and Last Name, "Article Title," Periodical Title, Volume Number, Month, Day, Year, p._____.

ATTACHMENT # 4

SELF-CONTROL

John is driving down the highway at a legal 55 miles per hour, when suddenly, approximately one-fourth of a mile in front of him, a slow-moving tractor pulls out. There are two things John can do. He can panic and involuntarily swerve, brake, or even take his hands from the wheel, or he can remain calm and plan out what he must do. In the end, John brakes lightly, looks behind him to make a lane change, and passes as if the tractor had always been there. In this case, John's self-control, his restraint put upon himself, saved possible damage to both vehicles and possibly John's life. John knew enough not to let panic overtake him.

This is, of course, just one example of self-control. Breaking down to more everyday life, we can see how people are embarrassed and humiliated because of a lack of self-control. These people confront themselves with an emotional explosion every day. We can see a total lack of self-control by the host when he screams obscenities at the phone if it rings during entertaining. Of course he feels like an idiot afterwards for the "outburst," but he would not have been so belittled if he could have restrained himself.

I am sure each one of us has, at some time or other, experienced someone ahead of us who did not use the left turn blinker while we wanted to go straight in the same lane. Well, here we are stuck in traffic. If we control ourselves, we can find the moment rather enjoyable to peacefully listen to the radio. If we do not control ourselves, we honk and shake our fists. Taking the more rational and enjoyable course, I think I would listen to the radio for a moment.

Self-control is also looking back on what we did wrong after losing the most important basketball game of the season. In all too many professional games, I have seen grown men act like two-year olds, stomping, shouting, or whatever method they like most. The time wasted could have been used for replanning. We should try to think things over rationally. Too many people take the quickest and easiest way out when something happens. Many suicides are a perfect example of this. If we use self-control, we can restrain ourselves long enough to think it out. The stock market crash of 1929 is a good example of those who did not restrain themselves. Many ended their lives after hearing of the crash without even thinking of another try at the market or another business.

The best example of self-control is during an emergency. We must think before we react, and self-control gives us the opportunity and time for thinking. The old saying, "look before you leap" is

not without meaning. During a tornado, self-control is remaining in the basement where we know it is safe, and not trying to run away from it. The chance of an injury would be much greater in the street, although we are not immune from the chance in the basement. We need to prevent ourselves from doing foolish things. The fire department is able to cooperate as a team to extinguish a blazing fire; but without self-control, those men would not be able to work together. If just one man loses his hold on himself and runs away in fear, the teamwork is split and the building burns to the ground.

So we see that without self-control, our lives would be a little more complicated, embarrassing, and dangerous. The majority of the time, the restraint we put upon ourselves saves us only a red face and humiliation, but at some time it may be a real life saver.

(From pages 4 and 5 of the "West Wind" published by West High School in Waterloo, Iowa in 1979)

ATTACHMENT #5

SUMMARY:

Several situations in life require self control. Sometimes self control means restraining emotional outbursts which might be embarrassing later. Sometimes self control involves evaluation of events in order to profit from mistakes. In emergency situations self control is vital to maintain order and resist panic. Self control keeps life from becoming unnecessarily complicated, embarrassing, or even deadly.

PRECIS:

Many situations in our lives require us to use self control. We need often avoid emotional outbursts which accomplish little but our own embarrassment. We can also use self control by evaluating situations which turned out poorly and finding rational ways to deal with the failure. Most important, we must restrain ourselves in time of danger so that our panic does not endanger others. Our self restraint can save ourselves hassles, embarrassment, and physical harm.

ATTACHMENT #6

Steps in Writing A PRÉCIS

I. Read
   A. Carefully and slowly
   B. More than once

II. List main points

III. Note point of view

IV. Note tone (author attitude)

V. Restate main points in your own words, maintaining the point of view and tone of the orignial.

ATTACHMENT #7

PRÉCIS ASSIGNMENT

TURN IN:

I. Prewriting
   A. List of main points
   B. Note of point of view and tone

II. Copy of the original article or essay

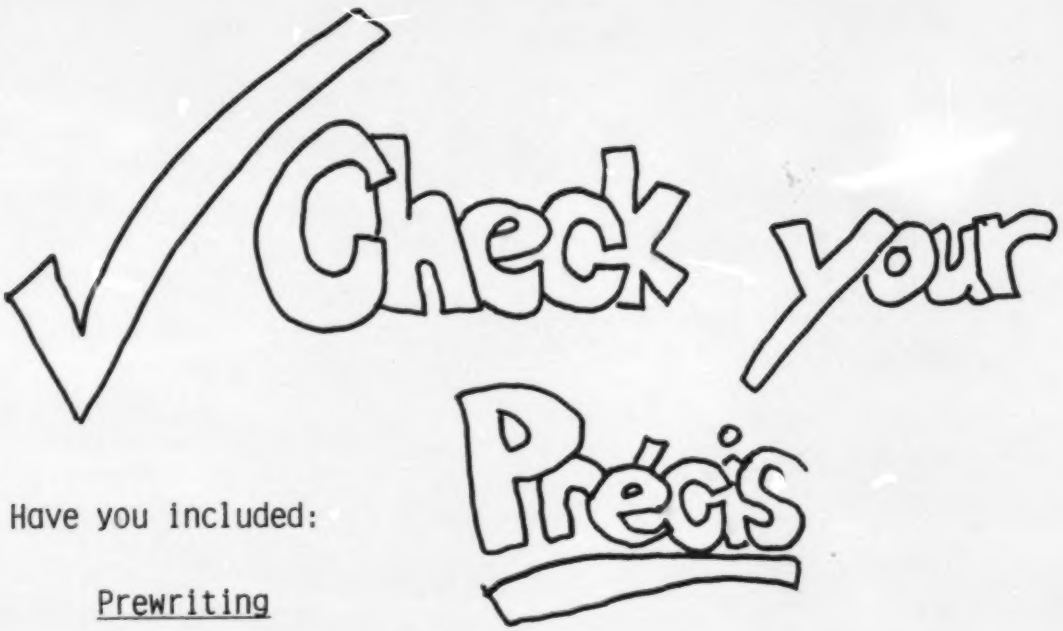
III. Final Copy
   A. Manuscript form
   B. Footnoted

SUGGESTED MATERIAL

Reviews Editorials Essays

ATTACHMENT #8

Review of Précis - Writing Steps



Have you included:

Prewriting

- List of main points
- Note of point of view and tone

Copy of original article

Final Copy of Précis

- Manuscript form
- Footnote
- 1/4 - 1/3 length of original article

ATTACHMENT # 9

Review of Précis Definition

PRÉCIS

"A brief but careful summary of the writer's essential thought:

I. Summary (condensed, shortened)

II. Paraphrase (restated in your own words)

III. Maintain the original
   A. Point of View
   B. Tone